

Ponteland First School

Thornhill Road, Ponteland, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE20 9QB

Inspection dates

1–2 February 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has created an effective and highly ambitious team of senior and middle leaders. They know the school well and their relentless energy in pursuing excellence is inspirational.
- Pupils make rapid progress in improving their reading skills. They are skilful and confident readers. Pupils' progress in mathematics and writing is also strong.
- The provision for children in the early years is strong and in the Nursery it is exemplary. This is because adults are highly skilled in spotting opportunities to extend children's learning.
- The school is highly successful in providing support for vulnerable pupils. Staff are passionate about securing the right support for pupils and their families.
- Teachers have strong skills; they are steeped in finding new ways to engage pupils and help them to make rapid progress. They use assessment information very well to make sure pupils are working at the right level.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent. The school is an oasis of calm and purposeful learning.
- Leaders use a highly effective tracking system to keep a careful eye on how well pupils are doing, especially in reading, writing and mathematics.
- If pupils' progress slips back, teachers provide short sessions of individual tuition which help pupils to catch up quickly.
- Pupils enjoy their lessons, and they are enthusiastic learners who are proud of their achievements.
- Governors provide the school with sharp challenge and equally strong support.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good and sometimes better progress. The proportions achieving a higher level of understanding does not match that of other pupils.
- Pupils' progress in foundation subjects does not match the rapid progress they make in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Boys' skills in writing are not as well developed as those of girls.
- Leaders' improvement planning is generally strong but lacks precision in identifying barriers to pupils' learning. Plans do not spell out exactly what success will look like.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Adjust leaders' improvement planning so that it clearly identifies the barriers to pupils' learning, precisely what success will look like and how it will be measured.
- Iron out the remaining inconsistencies in pupils' progress so that it is consistently outstanding for all groups of pupils and across all subjects by:
 - embedding the exciting approaches to writing
 - ensuring that the quality of teaching in foundation subjects matches that in reading, writing and mathematics
 - ensuring that the practice in Reception is of the same exemplary quality as that in the Nursery.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Effective team work is at the heart of the school's success. Leaders, teachers and other adults are united in their efforts to secure the best possible education for pupils and morale is high. Staff are determined that no child should be left behind. Consequently, pupils are enthusiastic learners who want to do well, and there is a culture of high ambition.
- The headteacher, who is also the school's special educational needs coordinator, ensures that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make the same rapid progress as their peers. Consequently, special educational needs funding is spent effectively. This is because teachers and other adults are ambitious for pupils, and systems to support their learning are focused on removing obstacles which prevent learning. The school monitors the small steps in pupils' progress and celebrates them. This helps to build the confidence of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and spurs them on to achieve even more.
- Leaders have boundless energy in seeking to improve teaching practice. As a result, teachers are keen to seek new ways to engage pupils and accelerate their progress. If teaching falls below the exacting standards set by senior leaders, teachers are supported through individual plans to improve their work. Leaders have been assiduous in tackling the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Newly qualified teachers are supported well and value the coaching and mentoring they receive.
- Leaders track pupils' progress carefully, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. They know how different groups of pupils are doing across all the year groups. When they spot a pupil who is underachieving they take effective steps to make sure they have the right support to catch up quickly. Systems to check how well different groups of pupils are doing in foundation subjects are not as strong.
- Pupils are prepared very well to embrace British values and take their place in society as thoughtful, sociable and caring citizens. They celebrate the differences and diversity in society and enjoy learning about different cultures and religions. Pupils have high regard for rules and have little hesitation in making amends when they have broken a rule or upset someone else. Pupils have a highly attuned sense of justice and fairness.
- The curriculum provides the school with an effective tool to engage pupils and broaden their education. Leaders give careful thought to topic work so that pupils continue to practise their reading, writing and mathematics skills while considering such things as life in other countries. For example, a recent theme was chocolate, and pupils explored the historical and geographical aspects associated with it. The curriculum for other foundation subjects is more variable, and the development of skills over time is not consistent.
- The school provides a range of popular clubs and activities which attract high rates of pupil participation. Leaders supplement the curriculum with visits, trips and visitors which stimulate pupils and further enhance their love of school and learning.
- Leaders have spent the pupil premium wisely, and almost all disadvantaged pupils reach the expected levels of understanding in reading, writing and in mathematics.

Leaders and teachers know disadvantaged pupils well and plan carefully to improve their progress. However, leaders have not been as successful in unpicking the exact barriers facing disadvantaged pupils, so interventions are not precisely focused on overcoming pupils' specific challenges. The school's improvement plan does not highlight with sufficient sharpness how leaders, including governors, will check on the effectiveness of actions to improve the school.

- The sport premium is used effectively to ensure that teachers gain confidence in teaching different aspects of physical education (PE). The wide range of sports activities has captured pupils' interest, and most take part in at least one activity and many others attend two or more.
- The local authority has rightly maintained a light touch approach with this effective school. Recently the school's improvement partner has provided effective support to ensure new leaders develop their skills in observing learning and to prepare them for the rigours ahead of them as the school takes on Year 5 in September.

Governance of the school

- Governors are skilful and effective. Their calm determination to support leaders in providing a high-quality standard of education is reflected in their thorough analysis of reports provided by leaders:
 - Governing body minutes capture the effective challenge that governors offer and their tenacity in seeking answers to their questions.
 - Governors know the school's strengths well and understand areas which require further work. They speak knowledgeably about pupils' achievements and use their time effectively to make sure they maintain an accurate and objective view of the school.
 - As the school prepares to become a primary school, governors are keeping a watchful eye on the school's plans to ensure that leaders and teachers are thoroughly prepared, seeking advice where needed and supporting effective partnership arrangements with other primary schools.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The safeguarding culture in the school is strong. As a result, pupils feel safe and parents have faith in the school. The care for vulnerable pupils and their families is particularly successful in securing support from external agencies.
- The behaviour support worker is tireless in ensuring that any instances of poor behaviour are recorded and followed up. Occasionally, the recording by other staff of informal monitoring does not match this exemplary practice.
- Staff training is given high priority, and adults are vigilant in spotting warning signs that pupils may be experiencing difficulties.
- Risk is assessed appropriately, including the risk posed by extremism and radicalisation. The school does not hesitate to make referrals to the appropriate authority when they have a concern. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum allows

time for pupils to discuss emerging ideas in a safe environment with confident staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers are reflective and skilful. They use effective questioning skills to probe pupils' understanding and reveal any misconceptions. When teachers see pupils struggling with a particular skill or concept they act with impressive speed to provide pupils with extra support outside the lesson to help them stay on track.
- Assessment information is generally used effectively by teachers to make sure pupils have the right amount of challenge. In most cases, this results in the most able pupils being pushed to think deeply about their work and tackle exciting challenges. However, this highly effective practice is not fully consistent across different classes.
- The teaching of phonics is particularly successful, and the number of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check has improved rapidly in recent years. Pupils are confident in using their phonic skills to tackle the reading of unfamiliar words and to spell more adventurous words in their writing. Less-able pupils tackle their reading eagerly and are not fazed by tricky words. Occasionally, pupils come across words they do not fully understand but do not make full use of the resources teachers make available for them, such as word banks.
- Pupils are gaining strong mathematical skills as a result of successful teaching. Teachers have ensured that pupils gain a firm foundation in applying calculations. The opportunities for pupils to explain their reasoning are developing well. Pupils apply their mathematical skills in other subjects, such as science, and this helps to deepen their understanding.
- Pupils write frequently and at length across a range of subjects. They are keen to get their 'pen licence' and quickly adopt an assured cursive script. Boys' writing is not as strong as that of girls. Teachers are tackling this with vigour, providing writing tasks to engage boys and adopting exciting approaches using talk and actions to stimulate ideas. Teachers have created a rich environment for writing by providing a range of materials so that pupils have the resources to hand when they need them.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well. Teachers and teaching assistants have effective advice about pupils' needs and adapt tasks so that pupils make progress and are proud of their success.
- Pupils have good relationships with their teachers and each other. Pupils settle to work quickly and behave very well. They are keen to discuss their work and help each other out. Pupils value the feedback they get from teachers and generally use it well to improve their work.
- The quality of teaching in foundation subjects does not consistently match the quality of teaching in mathematics, reading and writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are confident, friendly and caring. They have great faith in the adults in the school to take action if they have any worries or concerns. They take advantage of the 'worry boxes' that are placed around the school, confident that adults will take their concerns seriously.
- Pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable benefit from highly effective care. Staff work successfully with a range of outside agencies, making timely referrals, and are dogged in their determination to secure appropriate support.
- The strong relationships between staff and pupils provides an environment in which it is easy for pupils to seek support. The personal, social and health education curriculum supports this well, helping pupils to consider their own physical and emotional development as well as tackling difficult subjects such as recognising stereotypes and guarding against prejudice.
- Pupils have a highly developed understanding of how to stay safe, including protecting themselves online. They speak eloquently about the harm bullying can cause, and they understand the different forms bullying can take.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils behave extremely well inside the classrooms, on the playground and around the school. The atmosphere around the school is calm, and inspection evidence shows that this is typically the case.
- Pupils are diligent and have highly positive attitudes to learning. They are thoughtful about the consequences of their own actions and the effect they might have on others. Consequently, they work and play very well together.
- Pupils with identified behaviour difficulties receive excellent support in reducing their incidences of poor behaviour. The behaviour support worker is instrumental in ensuring that meticulous records are kept, analysed and any monitoring is recorded in detail.
- Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average last year, and current in-school data shows attendance has improved this year. The differences in the rates of attendance for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities compared with that of other pupils nationally are diminishing swiftly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make rapid progress from their various starting points in writing, mathematics and particularly in reading across all years. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education. In 2016, most pupils at the end of key stage 1 achieved the expected level of understanding in reading, writing and mathematics and

the proportions achieving a higher level of understanding were above the national average.

- Pupils, including the most able, achieve very well across the school, and the school's current assessment information shows that this remains the case. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils are making rapid gains in reading and mathematics. Leaders are aware this is not fully consistent and there are variations in a few classes and across some of the foundation subjects.
- Pupils' progress in writing does not typically match the standards set in reading and mathematics. However, the school's recent focus on developing writing, particularly for boys, is paying dividends and improvements are gathering momentum. Leaders have highlighted pupils' spelling as an area in need of development and inspection evidence supports this view.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most able, generally keeps pace with other pupils, but there are occasions when they do not make the same accelerated progress. For example, in 2016, at the end of key stage 1 none of the disadvantaged pupils achieved a higher level of understanding in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because support from adults is precisely focused on the aspects of learning they need to improve.
- Pupils also make good and often better progress in Years 3 and 4. Work in pupils' books show that there are times when this is not consistent. For example, pupils' presentation and handwriting is not of a consistently high quality.

Early years provision

Good

- The majority of children enter the Nursery with skills, knowledge and abilities that are typical for their age. Children's skills in communication and language tend to be relatively weaker.
- Children make good and often better progress because of the expert work of adults. Adults know children very well, and they are highly skilled at spotting opportunities to extend children's learning. For example, as children in the Nursery busied themselves using different coloured sand to make and sell 'ice-creams', one child offered the assistant a spoon, and the assistant carefully guided him to identify bigger and smaller spoons, putting them in order of size. The child was then able to point to and name the biggest and smallest spoon. Occasionally, adults in the Reception class miss opportunities such as this to extend children's learning.
- Leaders have used additional funding to good effect, targeting resources to support adults in boosting disadvantaged children's language acquisition. This has been effective in improving children's communication skills.
- Leaders have implemented a highly effective tracking system which is used and understood very well by all the adults. Careful note is made of children's learning and used to plan their next steps.
- There is a rich environment, particularly in the Nursery, to support pupils' writing and reading skills. Opportunities to use letters and numbers are skilfully positioned so that

children are encouraged to develop their skills. For example, clipboards, mini whiteboards and paper are all in easy reach of any activity inside or outdoors, with a good supply of paper, pens and pencils.

- Staff communicate frequently with parents about what their children are learning, and they encourage them to contribute to the emerging picture of what children know, understand and can do. Learning journeys (the records kept of children's achievements over time) include examples of children's learning and experiences from home. Leaders use the information effectively to add to the rich picture they have about children's learning and the progress they have made.
- The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development has been consistently high and above the national average in recent years. Children are well prepared for their move into key stage 1.
- Children are confident in the provision, and they are curious and developing independence as they engage well with learning. Children cooperate well and negotiate with each other successfully because they are developing respect for each other.

School details

Unique reference number	122217
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10000735

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	346
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ruth Morris
Headteacher	Lynn Blain
Telephone number	01661 822 103
Website	www.pontelandfirst.co.uk
Email address	admin@pontelandfirst.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–29 November 2011

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is due to become a primary school in September 2017 with the addition of Year 5 and Year 6 in 2018.
- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for support from the pupil premium is much lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational need and/or disabilities is lower than the national average.
- The school is the lead school for School Direct in The Wider Ponteland Partnership.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons and made some short visits to classrooms. The headteacher joined the lead inspector on a short lesson visit.
- At the time of the inspection, Year 4 were on a residential visit. Inspectors conducted a review of the work in Year 4 pupils' books.
- The inspectors listened to Year 3 pupils read and reviewed the work in pupils' books across all years.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and during break was observed.
- Inspectors talked informally to pupils in lessons and around the school and held formal meetings with pupils from Year 3.
- The inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and senior leaders. In addition to this, inspectors met with members of the governing body, newly qualified teachers, staff responsible for safeguarding and attendance, and a group of middle leaders. The lead inspector also met a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including leaders' evaluation of the school's performance, school improvement planning, and documents monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and learning. They also looked at minutes of the governing body meetings, the school's own policies and documentation relating to safeguarding and attendance.
- Inspectors took into account the views of parents during the inspection, as well as 93 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- Inspectors took into account the views of the staff throughout the inspection and through their responses to Ofsted's online survey.

Inspection team

Joan Hewitt, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Julie McDowell	Ofsted Inspector
Dawn Foster	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Dawson	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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